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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**GAS STATION OPERATOR PLEADS GUILTY TO BANK LARCENY
AND INTERSTATE TRANSPORTATION OF STOLEN PROPERTY**

GREENBELT, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that Abid Imtiaz Chattha, age 45, of Waldorf, Maryland pled guilty today before U.S. District Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. to bank larceny and interstate transportation of stolen property arising out of his withdrawal of more than \$580,000 that has been mistakenly deposited into a bank account of a gas station he no longer operated.

According to the statement of facts presented at the plea proceeding, in 2002 Southern Maryland Oil Motor Fuels, Inc. ("SMO") of LaPlata, Maryland leased St. Charles Shell Station, 3855 Leonardtown Road, Waldorf, Maryland to Chattha through Chattha Brothers, Inc. ("CBI"). SMO required CBI to grant SMO electronic access to a bank account, held by CBI at Branch Banking and Trust Company ("BB&T"), from which SMO withdrew funds for the lease payments and purchase of fuel products. Additionally, funds were deposited into the BB&T account by Motiva Enterprises LLC ("Motiva"), a retail operations company partially owned by Shell, for reimbursement of credit card invoices.

According to the statement of facts, in December of 2002 SMO agreed to Chattha's request

to terminate the St. Charles Shell station lease and take over another station in Baltimore. The franchise relationship as to the St. Charles Shell station was terminated effective March 1, 2003 and electronic withdrawals and deposits were authorized for the new station using an account at Susquehanna Bank. As part of this transfer process all payments into the CBI BB&T account should have terminated. In August of 2003 SMO became aware that Motiva erroneously deposited \$580,815.28 into the CBI BB&T account from March to August, 2003 and that as of August 14, 2003, the account balance was \$11,981.51.

According to the statement of facts, when advised of the erroneous deposits on August 6, 2003, Chattha falsely stated that he did not know that the old BB&T account was still open. The same day, Chattha failed to stop payment on \$60,000 in checks that cleared that day, went to the bank and withdrew \$9,500 in cash. On August 12, 2003, upon learning that Chattha was trying to leave the country, FBI agents confronted Chattha, who had traveled from Maryland to the Washington Dulles International Airport in Virginia. Chattha admitted to the FBI agents at the airport that he knew that after he switched gas stations, funds continued to flow into the BB&T account which he knew did not belong to him, that he was losing \$15,000 to \$20,000 a week at gambling casinos in Atlantic City and that he withdrew the money from the BB&T account for his personal use. Chattha further stated that his wife who had traveled to the airport with him possessed about \$9,000 he had withdrawn from the account.

Chattha faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison on each count, followed by 3 years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. Judge Williams has scheduled sentencing for January 6, 2004.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Stuart A. Berman.